

THE NAVAJO NATION



JONATHAN NEZ | **PRESIDENT** MYRON LIZER | **VICE PRESIDENT**

25th Annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day
Address to the 54th Arizona State Legislature
January 15, 2020

Speaker Bowers, President Fann, House Leaders Petersen and Fernandez, Senate Leaders Gray and Bradley, Members of the Legislature, my fellow Tribal Leaders, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council, Speaker Seth Damon, Miss Navajo Shaandiin Parrish, and to all of our Diné people with us today — thank you for being with us for the 25th Annual Indian Nations and Tribes Legislative Day.

One-year ago today on January 15, 2019, Navajo Nation Vice President Myron Lizer and I took the sacred oath of office bestowed upon us by the votes of the Navajo people. Today marks the one-year anniversary of our administration's time in office and we are proud to report that our Nation continues to move forward on a positive path based on the concepts of Unity, Hope, and Resilience. We also congratulate all of our leaders at the state level for recently completing your first year in office for this current term as well.

Our administration believes that change presents opportunity – the opportunity to work together to strengthen and empower our people and our communities through the Navajo teaching we know as, “T’áá hwó’ ajít’éego,” or self-reliance and self-determination. We also appreciate the state of Arizona’s recognition of self-determination and sovereignty for all tribes.

The Nez-Lizer Administration continues to reinforce this teaching throughout the Navajo Nation, particularly among our young people. To create change and to better the lives of our people, we need to believe in ourselves individually, collectively, and at the government level, to become truly self-reliant and to determine our own future. T’áá hwó’ ajít’éego is an important teaching that our administration continues to promote and practice.

During our campaign, we visited over 75 chapters throughout the Navajo Nation and we listened to the issues and concerns brought forth by our people – we spent many hours meeting and documenting these issues. Since taking office, we have continued on a path in which we continue to engage with our people face to face in their respective communities. We believe that in order to truly understand and comprehend the needs and issues of our people, we need to be out in the communities to see the conditions firsthand.

On the Navajo Nation, just like the state of Arizona, we have many issues and initiatives that need the support of each of you seated here today. We have many roads that need improvements and upgrades, we have many Navajo children who need a hand up when it comes to their education, and we need each other to help strengthen our state and tribal economies.

The Navajo Nation has over 350,000 enrolled members and we expect that number to be a lot higher when the 2020 Census count is completed. We are becoming a greater force in every election across this state and this great country of ours. In the Phoenix metropolitan area, there are well over 35,000 members of the Navajo Nation and that number continues to grow as well. We have many of our people who are contributing great things to our state and across the country. We have more and more Navajo people who are medical doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, and we have even more who are enrolled in NAU, ASU, and UofA.

Recently, our administration signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the University of Arizona to establish the Navajo Law Fellowship Program with the overall goal of increasing the number of Navajo law school graduates and creating pathways to legal careers.

The new fellowship program is an investment in the future of the Navajo Nation, and also empowers young Navajo people to determine their own future and creates another pathway for Navajo students to come home and give back to their communities and build our Nation to make it even stronger! We have one of our very own who works here at the State Capitol serving as one of the Pages in the State Senate – Brianna Segay from Window Rock, Arizona – please stand to be recognized.

We also have the Navajo Nation Future Physicians' Scholarship Fund program, which is an agreement with the University of Arizona College of Medicine that is designed to help more Navajo students pursue careers as physicians. The program currently provides financial aid to seven Navajo students for the costs of tuition and academic support to help them earn a medical degree from the University.

These are the types of partnerships that the Navajo Nation is creating to build our future using the knowledge and ingenuity of our young Diné students and professionals. We are also working with Arizona State University and Northern Arizona University to partner on energy issues that help our Navajo communities and to build a sustainable energy future for our Nation.

With the recent closure of the Navajo Generating Station and Kayenta Mine, our Nation has not backed down, we have not given up — We recognize that coal-based energy provided many benefits for the NGS and Kayenta Mine workers and their families, but times are changing and energy development is changing.

As Diné people, we have always been resilient in times of change, and that's why we have a new vision when it comes to energy development. In April of 2019, Vice President Lizer and I issued a proclamation, known as the Háyoolkááł Proclamation, which stated that the Navajo Nation would prioritize renewable energy development for the long-term benefit of the Navajo people.

And today I'm proud to announce to all of you here today, that the Navajo Nation and Salt River Project are partnering to develop as much as 200-megawatts of solar energy by the year 2023!

This initiative will create jobs, revenue, and a sustainable source of energy for the long-term future. This is the new vision for energy development for the Navajo people — and we ask for your support as we continue to pursue renewable energy projects that can benefit the state of Arizona and the Navajo Nation. As the saying goes — what's good for the Navajo Nation is good for Arizona.

Due to the closure of the Navajo Generating Station and the Kayenta Mine, the Navajo Nation lost \$30 to \$50 million in annual revenue that is used to provide direct services for our Navajo people. For this current year's budget, we worked with the Navajo Nation Council use the interest earned off of our Permanent Trust Fund to make up the difference in our budget and in order to continue to provide direct services for our children, elders, veterans, and many others.

Power plants across the country continue to close and communities and people are being impacted. Recently, I met with the members of the Arizona Corporation Commission and called on them to establish a just transition fund, to help offset the financial impacts and shortfalls for communities affected by the closure of power plants, including non-tribal communities like Springerville and Joseph City. For the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe, the closure of NGS and Kayenta Mine have real impacts. We ask for your support and your advocacy to push forward with the creation of a just transition fund.

Another key component to building strong tribal economies that ultimately benefit everyone throughout the state of Arizona, is securing the rights to water resources that provide long-term water allocations for tribes. The Navajo Nation and the state of Utah have come to terms on a water settlement, and we are very close to having this settlement approved by Congress. We are confident that the negotiations over water rights with the state of Arizona can reach be completed to provide much needed water resources for the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, and the great state of Arizona.

Today, Vice President Myron Lizer is not with us because he is at the White House, as the United States finalizes the Phase One Trade Agreement with China, which requires structural reforms to China's economic and trade regime in the areas of intellectual property, technology transfer, agriculture, financial services, and currency and foreign exchange. The deal also includes a commitment by China to future purchases of U.S. goods and services.

We are optimistic that this trade agreement with China will open the doors for the Navajo Nation and other tribes to become an international economic engine, particularly in the area of agriculture. With the reauthorization of the Farm Bill, tribes now have the ability to oversee hemp production on tribal lands, as long as good sound policies and guidelines are in place, which will allow tribes to prosper even more.

The Navajo Nation has Navajo Agricultural Products Industry (NAPI) that has more than 8,200 acres of crop production specifically designated for export to Asian markets.

This agreement has the potential to allow the Navajo Nation to capitalize on our economic potential through increased agricultural production. The trade agreement will expand the Navajo Nation's ability to court investments in Navajo products.

This trade agreement has the potential to strengthen our economy, and ultimately it benefits the members of the Navajo Nation. The Navajo Nation is a sleeping giant when it comes to our economic potential. We have the resources, the land, the workforce, and the resilience of our Diné people to thrive in any market.

Our administration continues to support Navajo entrepreneurs and business owners through our "Buy Navajo, Buy Local" initiative, which encourages consumers to shop locally to support Navajo businesses. It's through creative initiatives like this that we can partner with the state of Arizona to bring more economic opportunities that benefit the state and the Navajo Nation.

When it comes to the Transaction Privilege Tax in the state of Arizona, tribes continue to seek a fair share of the revenue that so many of our tribal members contribute to. These funds can be used to develop much needed infrastructure, public safety, and education much like the tens of millions that tribes contribute to the state through gaming. Today, we will join Representative Bob Thorpe as he speaks about his upcoming bill to address the issue of Transaction Privilege Tax revenues and we thank him for his willingness to work together on this issue.

By working together with all of you, I believe we have the solutions to correct these problems. For the Navajo people, we are very fortunate to have three of our own who serve in the Arizona State Legislature — Senator Jamescita Peshlakai and Representatives Arlando Teller and Myron Tsosie.

Senator Peshlakai has been a strong advocate at the state level for our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Last year, we joined Governor Ducey and many of you here at the Capitol to announce the establishment of a study group to help return our many Indigenous people to their families and loved ones. We appreciate your support and leadership in this effort.

These individuals, Senator Peshlakai and Representatives Teller and Tsosie have introduced several bills in this session that bring attention to many issues that are important to the Navajo Nation and all tribes. We ask that you support them along the way and that you work together to bring positive changes that help our communities and our families.

When it comes to protecting Native American families and our children, I extend my sincere appreciation to Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich for joining the fight to protect the Indian Child Welfare Act!

In January of last year, Attorney General Brnovich announced that Arizona would join a bipartisan coalition of states that filed an amicus brief in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to defend the Indian Child Welfare Act in *Brakeen versus Zinke* case.

In addition to the support from the Attorney General of Arizona, the Navajo Nation has an Intergovernmental Agreement with Arizona to help with our ICWA cases and we appreciate that partnership. We also appreciate the efforts in Pima and Maricopa

Counties to establish ICWA courts, which we are confident will translate into the best outcomes possible for our children and families. We thank the state for supporting the defense of the Indian Child Welfare Act for all tribes!

In regards to gaming, the Navajo Nation appreciates the tremendous amount of work put in by tribal leaders across the state in negotiating a new gaming compact. The cooperation of tribes highlights the teaching of our elders, which calls on us as leaders to talk things out. With this important issue, the Navajo Nation and other Arizona tribes believe we have a gaming compact that will benefit both the state and tribes.

The Navajo Nation is facing critical economic issues and gaming revenue is part of our strategy to provide direct services to our Navajo People. I want to thank the tribal leaders who came together to discuss, negotiate, and debate the gaming compact. Thank you for your dedication and support of this new compact. We urge lawmakers to work with tribes and to come together for the benefit of all our people by supporting the gaming compact that we worked so hard to produce.

To my fellow tribal leaders who are with us today, we know that our children are precious and they are the future of our people. We know that life can be tough, especially for our children. In those challenging times it's important that we remember the teachings of our elders — it's important that we be united and show strength for our children to overcome the modern-day monsters like alcohol, drugs, depression, suicide, and other issues that many of our precious children deal with each day.

In the past year, we've partnered with the Hopi Tribe and the Pueblo of Zuni to raise awareness about diabetes and other health problems and to encourage our people to be more active and to make healthier choices. The Navajo Nation has declared a War on Diabetes and we are not backing down.

It's through these types of collaborations and partnerships amongst tribes that make us stronger and more united. When we present a united voice on issues, it makes it easier to advocate at every level of government. Together, we can create positive changes that help our people for many generations to come. I thank all of you for being here today on behalf of your people.

To the members of the House and Senate, Speaker Bowers and President Fann, I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you all today and I thank you for your leadership in moving the great state of Arizona and the Navajo Nation forward. Ahe'hee'